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FM AMEMBASSY NEW DELHI

TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 2118

INFO RUCNISL/ISLAMIC COLLECTIVE

RUEHBJ/AMEMBASSY BEIJING 4987

RUEHLM/AMEMBASSY COLOMBO 8469

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RUEHBUL/AMEMBASSY KABUL 3914

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RUEHLO/AMEMBASSY LONDON 2510

RUEHMO/AMEMBASSY MOSCOW 1084

RUEHKO/AMEMBASSY TOKYO 4305

RUEHCI/AMCONSUL CALCUTTA 8159

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RHEHNSC/NSC WASHDC

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RUCPDOC/DEPT OF COMMERCE WASHDC

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RHMFISS/HQ USSOCOM MACDILL AFB FL

RHMFISS/HQ USCENTCOM MACDILL AFB FL

RUEKJCS/SECDEF WASHDC

RUEKJCS/JOINT STAFF WASHDC

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 NEW DELHI 000209

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SUBJECT: MUKHERJEE'S PAKISTAN TRIP YIELDS LITTLE FOR INDIA

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Classified By: PolCouns Ted Osius, Reason 1.5 (B,D)

¶1. (C) Summary. Indian Foreign Minister Mukherjee met with Pakistani leaders in Islamabad on January 13th and 14th, announcing that Pakistani Foreign Minister Kasuri will visit New Delhi in February, inaugurating the next round of composite dialogue with Foreign Secretary talks on March 13th and 14th, and inviting Pakistani Prime Minister Shaukat Aziz -- not President Musharraf -- to the SAARC summit this spring. President Musharraf's refusal to attend SAARC, unless Prime Minister Singh visits Pakistan first, was seen in Indian press as a slight against New Delhi as reports for weeks here said Mukherjee would pass the SAARC invitation to Musharraf. PM Singh in recent weeks has been touting his efforts to soften borders between India and Pakistan using the European Union-model envisioned by SAARC in his campaign speeches for upcoming state-level elections in Punjab, but press reports here noted that Pakistan refused again to grant India a free trade agreement. Nonetheless, the full schedule of composite dialogue announced for the coming months -- with the start of a Sir Creek survey, technical level talks on Siachen, and Mukherjee's statements that India would consider anything short of redrawing borders to resolve the Kashmir dispute -- speak as much about positive atmospherics between the two countries as they do about the heavy weight of the issues at hand. That said the GOI firmly tamped down Pakistani exuberance over a possible breakthrough, and the press here echoed those views. While progress continues, so, too, does the hard slog on difficult issues. End Summary.

Talks Still Churning Forward

¶2. (C) The press in India gave a lukewarm response to the weekend talks, with special emphasis on Mukherjee and Kasuri's announcement that the first Joint Anti-Terror Mechanism meeting will be held in March. Indian press predictably paid little notice to the main CBM forthcoming from the trip, an agreement to prevent accidental use of nuclear weapons, which both sides plan to sign when Kasuri travels to India in February. Musharraf's commitment to set up a Committee on Prisoners to search for Indian POW's held in Pakistan since the 1965 and 1971 wars also received a positive reaction in India, although family members of 54 potential POW's told reporters that they remained skeptical because they were not given access to prisons to search for their loved ones during similar past trips. Former High Commissioner to Pakistan G. Parthasarthy scoffed at the meager results of Mukherjee's visit, telling PolCouns that India should not have fumbled the SAARC invitation, especially given advance signals from Pakistan that it would not be accepted.

BJP/Army Raising Political Road Blocks

¶3. (C) Opposition Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) leaders responded to the visit with accusations that Mukherjee had let the Pakistanis off the hook on terrorism, allowing talks to continue with no mention of numerous recent arrests of Pakistan-based terrorists in Bangalore and New Delhi. The BJP also accuses Pakistan's Inter-Services Intelligence Division of funding massacres by terrorists in Assam against the state's minority Hindi-speaking population. Indian Army leaders also raised their voices publicly again against any agreement on the Siachen dispute that would allow Pakistan

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latitude to attempt to retake the area.

Terrorist Attack Sends Message to the Mirwaiz

¶4. (C) Terrorists meanwhile lobbed a grenade close to All Parties Hurriyat Conference (APHC) leader Mirwaiz Omar Farooq's house on January 15th. The Mirwaiz was already on his way to New Delhi at the time in preparation for his trip January 17th to Islamabad, and there were no injuries due to the attack. Press reports say the Mirwaiz responded defiantly to the terrorists' blatant warning -- saying he would not be deterred from his efforts to resolve the Kashmir dispute and bring peace to the Srinagar Valley. Moderate Separatist Bilal Lone told Senior Pol FSN that the APHC delegation plans to leave for Islamabad on January 18th, although talks with Prime Minister Singh either may be off the table again or may take place on their return.

PM Needs Pakistan's Support

¶5. (C) Comment: The Prime Minister will need cooperation from Islamabad if he has any chance of agreeing to a trip to Pakistan in the coming months, given the political opposition he faces from the right. The Army's voice in India is also a significant political hurdle for Prime Minister Singh on the Siachen issue. If Pakistan is looking for concessions from India on Siachen in exchange for movement on Sir Creek, progress on both will be slow in coming. Siachen is the single issue on which India risks losing territory to Pakistan if it agrees to withdraw without extending the Line of Control, because, as Army leaders frequently point out, geography gives Pakistan the upper hand in any race to regain the territory. The BJP has yet to capitalize fully on the political issues surrounding the talks, but if they succeed in keeping public attention more focused on terrorism than the positive implications of peace with Pakistan, they may gain ground in coming elections in Punjab and Uttar Pradesh and further weaken the Prime Minister's bargaining power.

Even as India races ahead with ASEAN and China trade, Pakistan's efforts to use SAARC as a bargaining chip also undermine the Prime Minister's very personal interest in resolving India's dispute with Pakistan by laughing in the face of his dream of softening the borders between the two Punjabs enough to have "breakfast in Amritsar, lunch in Lahore, and dinner in Kabul." The slim net result of Mukherjee's visit explains the lukewarm reaction in the media here, as well as the clear GOI efforts to signal that Pakistani exuberance over any imminent breakthrough is premature. At least the two sides continue to talk.

¶6. (C) Visit New Delhi's Classified Website:

(<http://www.state.sgov.gov/p/sa/newdelhi/>)

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